

# Coronavirus in the UK: Hospitality Industry in Crisis Despite Digital Options

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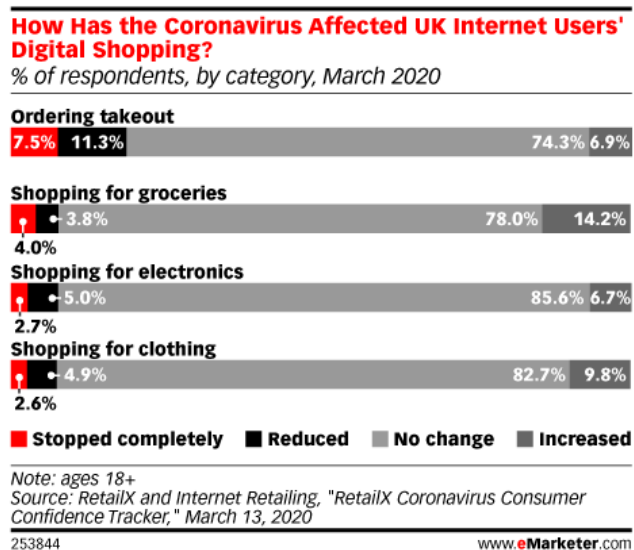
**T**he coronavirus pandemic is touching all aspects of daily life in the UK and around the world. From an industry perspective, those most affected thus far rely on movement of people, particularly travel and hospitality. Some have been able to adapt to this new reality, sustained largely by digital, but the hospitality sector is grappling with an environment where human contact of any kind is becoming increasingly limited, even when mediated by digital.

On March 16, the UK prime minister advised people to avoid going to pubs, clubs and restaurants, which in turn caused the hospitality industry to take a sharp and collective intake of breath. With no clear directive to definitively close down, establishments faced no other choice but to stay open.

Without a clearly outlined government aid package, and with people staying away, there have already been signs that the hospitality sector could be brought to its knees. Stories of layoffs land daily, the most recent being the Coylumbridge Hotel in Scotland, whose owners told workers who live at the hotel complex to leave the premises immediately. Some of the non-native staff have been unable to return home due to travel restrictions, and have nowhere to live and no income, the BBC [reported](#).

The government offered a glimmer of hope, though. On March 17, the communities secretary announced that planning rules in the UK would be relaxed so that pubs and restaurants could operate as hot food takeaways.

But despite the expected surge in mobile ordering and delivery services, March 2020 data from [RetailX](#) and [Internet Retailing](#) indicated that ordering takeaway food may not be at the top of UK shoppers' priority lists. Among internet users surveyed, only 6.9% said they had increased their use of takeaway ordering, with 18.8% saying they'd either reduced this habit or stopped completely—the highest response rate across all shopping habits queried.



Speaking to [The Guardian](#) last week, infectious diseases expert Dr. Thomas Tsai outlined the challenges facing takeaway delivery staff: "The COVID-19 virus is borne by droplets transmitted through, for example, coughing and sneezing. ... Given the number of people they see daily, the deliverers are probably among those at greatest risk of exposure. If we can minimize unnecessary food delivery, we should."

UK consumers are getting edgy, and rightly so. Even where digital platforms mediate in the hospitality industry, there's still a human element. As the days pass and a full-on lockdown looks increasingly likely, bar owners, restaurateurs and nightclub owners are looking

deeper into the abyss. Unless the government comes to their aid with fiscal support, closures could reach unprecedented levels—despite digital options.